

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 648**

[I.D. 061698D]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Hearings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a series of public hearings to solicit comments on proposals to be included in Amendment 9 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Northeast Multispecies Fishery, Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP, the Atlantic Herring FMP, and in a single amendment that brings all Council FMPs (Multispecies, Sea Scallop, Herring, Monkfish and Atlantic Salmon) into compliance with essential fish habitat (EFH) requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA).

DATES: Written comments will be accepted through July 15, 1998, for Amendment 9 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP, through July 31, 1998, for the EFH amendment, and through August 3, 1998, for Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP and the Atlantic Herring FMP. The hearings will begin June 29, 1998, and end July 22, 1998. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates.

ADDRESSES: Send comments to Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 5 Broadway, Saugus, MA 01906-1097. Hearings will be held in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Virginia, and North Carolina. Requests for special accommodations should be addressed to the New England Fishery Management Council, 5 Broadway, Saugus, MA 01906-1097; telephone: (781) 231-0422. For specific locations, see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, (781) 231-0422.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council proposes to take action to address the new and revised requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the SFA of 1996. The Council will consider comments from fishermen, interested parties, and

the general public on the proposals and alternatives described in four separate public hearing documents. These documents have been prepared for amendments to the Northeast Multispecies and Sea Scallop FMPs, the Herring FMP, and an amendment for compliance with EFH, which will amend the previously mentioned plans as well as the Monkfish and Atlantic Salmon FMPs. Once it has considered public comments, the Council will approve final measures and prepare submission packages for NMFS. There will be additional opportunities for public comments when the proposed rules for these actions are published in the **Federal Register**.

Amendment 9 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP

The Council is presenting the following items for public review and comment: (1) Proposed new or revised overfishing definitions for 12 species in the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Unit (excluding silver hake and red hake, which the Council will address in a separate amendment); (2) a revised specification of optimum yield (OY) from the fishery; (3) the inclusion of Atlantic halibut in the Multispecies FMP, with measures to stop overfishing and rebuild the halibut stocks; (4) modification of the rules allowing the use of square mesh nets by otter trawl vessels; (5) a 1-inch increase in the minimum size for winter flounder; (6) a possession limit for the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder fisheries; (7) adjustments to trip limit management methods; (8) postponement of the Vessel Monitoring Systems requirement beyond the scheduled implementation date of May 1, 1999; (9) a prohibition on the use of "streetsweeper" trawl gear; and (10) a framework adjustment process for approval of aquaculture projects in the EEZ. The Council will consider all comments received on these proposals until the end of the comment period on July 15, 1998.

Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP

The following proposals will be discussed in the public hearing document: (1) A new overfishing definition and rebuilding targets for Atlantic sea scallops; (2) a revised specification of OY from the fishery; (3) a 10-year rebuilding schedule as the preferred alternative and a 7-year schedule as a non-preferred alternative; (4) options for increasing the minimum mesh size of the twine top portion of scallop dredges to reduce the bycatch of finfish; (5) continuation of mid-Atlantic

closed areas (unless opened under specific reopening criteria adopted as part of the amendment); (6) a system for closing areas to improve yield per recruit; (7) annual monitoring and adjustment of measures to rebuild the resource; and (8) a provision to allow the following measures to be implemented through the framework adjustment process: (a) leasing of scallop DAS; (b) scallop size restrictions; and (c) aquaculture enhancement measures. Measures to end overfishing and rebuild the scallop resource will require substantial reductions in fishing in the next several years. Although the proposals are expected to have positive long-term economic impacts, they also are expected to have severely negative short-term economic, social, and fishing community impacts. These impacts are summarized in the public hearing document, which will be available at the hearings. The Council will consider all comments received until the end of the comment period on August 3, 1998.

Atlantic Herring FMP

Major elements of the proposals in the public hearing document include (1) a definition of overfishing and establishment of a total allowable catch (TAC); (2) various options to distribute the TAC; (3) options for controlling the catch, either through mandatory days out of the fishery (an open access fishery) or through a controlled access system; (4) alternatives for addressing spawning restrictions; (5) the size of vessels in the fishery; (6) allowed uses for herring (such as for roe or meal); (7) regulations for joint venture and internal waters processing operations; and (8) administrative requirements such as vessel, dealer and operator permits, vessel and dealer reporting requirements, and observer/sea sampler provisions. These are joint Council/Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) public hearings. The ASMFC measures will be adopted in state waters, while the Council measures will apply to vessels holding Federal permits to fish in the EEZ. The Council will consider all comments received until the end of the comment period on August 3, 1998.

Essential Fish Habitat Amendment

The Council will conduct hearings to consider public comment on management proposals to address the EFH requirements of the SFA and to submit measures to the Secretary of Commerce as an amendment to all Council FMPs. The following items will be available for public review and comment: (1) The identification and

description of EFH for Atlantic herring, sea scallops, Atlantic salmon, and 15 species of groundfish; (2) the identification of proposed habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) for Atlantic cod and Atlantic salmon; (3) an assessment of fishing-related threats and impacts to EFH; (4) consideration of management measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of fishing activities on EFH and HAPC; (5) an assessment of non-fishing related threats and impacts to EFH; (6) conservation and enhancement measures and recommendations developed to mitigate the adverse impacts of non-fishing related activities on EFH and HAPC; (7) a provision to allow the revision of the EFH designations and additional management measures for the conservation of EFH to be implemented through the framework adjustment process; and (8) research and information requirements to improve the designation of EFH and better understand the impacts of fishing and non-fishing activities on EFH. The Council will consider all comments received until the end of the comment period on July 31, 1998.

Public Hearings

The dates, times, locations and telephone numbers of the hearings are scheduled as follows:

Amendment 9 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP—

Monday, June 29, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Seaport Inn, 110 Middle Street, Fairhaven, MA 02719; telephone (508) 997-1281;

Tuesday, June 30, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland, ME 04101; telephone (207) 775-2311;

Wednesday, July 1, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn, US Route 1 & 3, Ellsworth, ME 04605; telephone (207) 667-9341;

Monday July 6, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—St. Peter's Club, 21-23 Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930; telephone (978) 281-3160;

Tuesday, July 7, 1998, 3:00 p.m.—Radisson Hotel, 35 Governor Winthrop

Boulevard, New London, CT 06320; telephone (860) 443-7000;

Wednesday, July 8, 1998, 3:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn, 290 Highway 37 East, Tom's River, NJ 08753; telephone (732) 244-4000; and

Monday, July 13, 1998, 3:00 p.m.—Ramada Inn, 1127 Route 132, Hyannis, MA 02601; telephone (508) 775-1153.

Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP—

Monday, June 29, 1998, 1:30 p.m.—Seaport Inn, 110 Middle Street, Fairhaven, MA 02719; telephone (508) 997-1281;

Wednesday, July 1, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn, US Route 1 & 3, Ellsworth, ME 04605; telephone (207) 667-9341;

Monday, July 6, 1998, 3:00 p.m.—Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 943 Washington Square Mall, Washington, NC 27889; telephone (919) 946-6481;

Tuesday, July 7, 1998, 3:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn Executive Center, 5655 Greenwich Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23462; telephone (757) 499-4400; and

Wednesday, July 8, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Grand Hotel, 1045 Beach Drive, Cape May, NJ 08204; telephone (609) 884-5611.

Atlantic Herring FMP—

Tuesday, June 30, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Radisson Hotel, 2081 Post Road, Warwick, RI 03886; telephone (401) 739-3000;

Wednesday July 1, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Sawyer Free Library, 2 Dale Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930; telephone (978) 281-9763;

Monday, July 6, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Maine Department of Marine Resources, 194 McKown Point Road, West Boothbay Harbor, ME 04575; telephone (207) 633-9500;

Wednesday, July 8, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Grand Hotel, 1045 Beach Drive, Cape May, NJ 08204; telephone (609) 884-5611; and

Thursday, July 9, 1998, 2:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn Executive Center, 5655 Greenwich Road, Virginia Beach, VA.

Essential Fish Habitat Amendment—

Tuesday, July 14, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Sawyer Free Library, 2 Dale Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930; telephone (978) 281-9763;

Wednesday, July 15, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Maine Department of Marine Resources, 194 McKown Point Road, West Boothbay Harbor, ME 04575; telephone (207) 633-9500;

Thursday, July 16, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Urban Forestry Center, 45 Elwyn Road, Portsmouth, NH 03801; telephone (603) 436-9713;

Friday, July 17, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Massachusetts Maritime Academy, 101 Academy Drive, Buzzards Bay, MA 02532; telephone (508) 830-5000;

Monday, July 20, 1998, 1:00 p.m.—Holiday Inn, 290 Highway 37 East, Tom's River, NJ 08753; telephone (732) 244-4000; and

Wednesday, July 22, 1998, 6:00 p.m.—Radisson Hotel, 2081 Post Road, Warwick, RI 02886; telephone (401) 739-3000.

Although other issues not contained in this agenda may come before this Council for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal Council action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Paul J. Howard (see ADDRESSES) at least 5 days prior to the meeting dates.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 19, 1998.

Gary C. Matlock,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 98-16785 Filed 6-23-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F